



Defense again carries The Woodlands in win over Atascocita

By Jason McDaniel | October 4, 2014

SHENANDOAH – Atascocita had its say early in each half. The rest of the game belonged to The Woodlands and its still-stinging defense.

The Highlanders, minus defensive captain Corey Sanders, who suffered a broken arm in Week 4, won 24-14 on Friday night at Woodforest Bank, handing the Eagles their first loss of the season.

"There's no hiding it – he's a phenomenal player," said cornerback T.C. Schneider, who recorded an interception on the opening series. "It's a huge loss."

"Zak Yglecias has done a great job out there, coming in, but it's a big thing missing him. But we're going to get by, because we have to, until he gets back (possibly for the start of the playoffs)."

The Woodlands improved to 5-1 overall, 2-0 in District 16-6A. Atascocita dropped to 5-1, 1-1.

The Eagles had 181 yards at the break but finished with 279 as the Highlanders controlled the second half. Atascocita quarterback Niyi Campbell (12-of-19, 70 yards) completed only one pass after halftime.

"That means that we're rushing the quarterback, we're hurrying him, (and) we're doing a great job of breaking up passes," The Woodlands coach Mark Schmid said. "I can't say enough about how we played defensively."

Nursing a 17-14 lead late, QB Chris Andritsos, who played the whole second half in place of Matt Bonaguidi, found Chris Bell with a short pass, and Bell broke a tackle for a 41-yard touchdown. The score gave The Woodlands a 24-14 lead with 4:24 left in the game.

Schmid said Bonaguidi, who threw three interceptions in the first half, was ill most of the week, limiting his practice time.

"Matt's our starter, so we started with him, but Chris was doing most of the practicing this week, so we felt like we would go with him in the second half," Schmid said.

Andritsos was 6-of-12 passing for 78 yards and a TD.

Bonaguidi finished 7-of-11 for 110 yards and two TDs. Bell caught four passes for 75 yards and two scores, Kalif Johnson supplied a 50-yard TD grab and Patrick Carr carried 16 times for 114 yards.

The Woodlands tallied 331 yards and 14 first downs. "It was a total team win for us because there were a lot of things that happened," Schmid said. "We had three turnovers in the game, and when you watch enough football you know three turnovers sometimes are hard to overcome."

Atascocita moved the ball with ease on its first two drives but trailed 17-7 at the half. After the Eagles took a 7-0 lead on Campbell's 25-yard scramble seven minutes in, the Highlanders' defense took over, forcing two turnovers on downs and three punts on the next five possessions.

Linebacker Geoffrey Keating sniffed out a fake punt in the second quarter, tackling Dominique Harrison for a 10-yard loss and setting up Nacho Garcia's 35-yard field goal for a 10-point advantage.

Atascocita pulled within 17-14 on its first series of the third quarter, with Deneric Gibson scoring on a four-yard run, but it hurt itself with untimely penalties and poor decisions the rest of the way.

"Those are drive killers between two evenly matched teams," Atascocita coach Craig Stump said. "When you do that, you put yourself behind the chains. We were able to make it up sometimes, but you can't consistently make it up. "We had chances to win the game, (we) just didn't make enough plays."



The Woodlands Highlanders trip up the Atascocita Eagles, 24-14

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SHENANDOAH, Texas -- The Woodlands Highlander (5-1, 2-0) football team came into their contest against the undefeated Atascocita Eagles battle-tested, and it showed. Despite not the most complete game, The Highlanders found a way to win 24-14 at Woodforest Bank Stadium Saturday night.

"Defense played exceptionally well, shut them down the entire second half (outside of one drive)," said Highlander Head Coach Mark Schmid. "Means we are hurrying the quarterback, breaking up passes, a lot of good things about the defense. Special teams helped us flipped the field, give the offense shorter fields than they had. The offense came through and took advantage of the opportunities they had and made some big plays."

Leading the way for the Highlanders was Patrick Carr, who carried the ball 16 times for 114 yards. Quarterback Matt Bonaguidi threw for 110 yards and two scores, and quarterback Chris Andritsos threw for 78 yards and a score. Wide receiver Chris Bell came down with four receptions for 75 yards and two touchdowns, and Kalif Johnson finished with 55 yards and a score on the night. The Highlanders finished the night with 331 yards of total offense, and two interceptions (TC Schneider and AJ Mason with one each) on defense.

The Eagles got a superb effort from quarterback Niyi Campbell, who ran the ball 24 times for 132 yards and a touchdown, and threw for an additional 70 yards. Running back Deneric Gibson rushed for 53 yards and a score in the defeat. The Eagles had 279 total yards of offense, and finished the night with three turnovers on the defensive side of the ball (all interceptions), but couldn't capitalize on them throughout the contest.

Atascocita (5-1, 1-1) was moving quickly to start the game, highlighted by a Deneric Gibson 30-yard run down to the Highlander 13-yard line. However the next play saw Campbell try a throw to the reverse side of the field, and Woodlands defensive back TC Schneider was ready for it and made the interception, returning the ball to the 17-yard line.

On the Highlanders first possession, the Eagle defense was ready to return the favor. Bonaguidi was a hair late on his attempted pass, and Atascocita defensive back Ramsey Thunder jumped the route for an interception to give the ball back to the Eagles at the Highlander 43-yard line.

The Eagles would capitalize on their interception, as a 3rd-and-15 would see quarterback Campbell get out of the pocket and scramble to the end zone for a 25-yard score, giving Atascocita a 7-0 edge, with 5:33 left in the first quarter.

The teams battled for field position for the next several series, until a 3rd-and-3 from midfield saw the Highlanders strike back. Bonaguidi dropped back and patiently hit senior wide receiver Kalif Johnson in stride as he got free behind the defense for a 50-yard score, evening the game at 7-7 with 9:54 left in the second quarter.

The Eagles next possession went three-and-out, and punt-returner Antoine Winfield Jr. picked up a bouncing ball at the Highlander 47-yard line and found a crease, taking the ball to the Eagles 26-yard line, setting The Woodlands up in prime position with 8:40 left in the second quarter.

The second play from scrimmage on that possession saw Carr get outside for a seven yard gain, and on 3rd-and-3 Bonaguidi found Chris Bell streaking down the sideline for a 20-yard strike, to give the Highlander a 14-7 advantage with 7:43 left in the half.

The next Eagle possession resulted in a 4th-and-inches, and Atascocita attempted a fake punt. The Highlander defense wasn't fooled and tackled the Eagles for a loss to take over at the Atascocita 24-yard line with 6:45 left in the second quarter.

The Highlander drive ended with a successful 35-yard field goal for kicker Nacho Garcia, to widen the gap to 17-7 Highlanders with 4:39 left in the second quarter and close out the scoring for the half.

The Highlanders came out of the locker room with a quarterback change, as Chris Andritsos was taking the snaps from the shotgun. However, the first drive for the Highlanders was a quick three-and-out, and the Eagles offense was back on the field.

"This week Matt (Bonaguidi) was sick, he had a bug," said Schmid. "Chris (Andritsos) got the lion's share of the repetitions this week and the majority of the practice time, so most of what we game-planned to do, Andritsos got in practice. Both kids did a great job and we're blessed to have both of them."

The first possession for the Eagles in the second half led to a focused, consistent drive that saw the Eagles move right down the field. Gibson ended the drive with a 4-yard scamper through the defense to tighten the game to 17-14 Highlanders, with 7:20 left in the third quarter.

The defenses started to take over the game at this point, and no one threatened with points for several drives. After a 62-yard punt for the Eagles took the ball to the Highlander 3-yard line, Carr busted free for 49-yard run to get the ball into Eagle territory and flip field position with 9:44 left to play. However the drive stalled due to penalties, and it was back on the Highlander defense to hold onto the lead.

Thankfully for The Woodlands, the defense was up to the task, forcing another three-and-out, and the Highlanders got the ball back at their own 41-yard line with 6:34 left looking to close out the game.

Closing out the game is exactly what happened. Trying to find a way to get points, Andritsos threw an out-route to Chris Bell, who beat his man and then cut back inside the field of play to get around the safety for a clutch 41-yard touchdown, giving the Highlanders much needed breathing room at 24-14 with 4:24 left to play.

The defense had no problems keeping momentum on the Highlanders side after the score. On 4th-and-5 from the Eagle's 34-yd line, Campbell attempted a pass that was intercepted by Highlander's defensive back AJ Mason at their own 49-yard line, and time had run out on the Eagles, as the Highlanders claimed the win 24-14.

"We're not in the driver's seat, but we're in great position," said Schmid. "Atascocita may be one of the better teams in the district, so getting a win over them makes me real happy. We have a rivalry game next week against College Park, so that's always an interesting battle. After that we go into our bye week, so it would make me feel really good if we could go into that 3-0."

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The Woodlands stops Atascocita 24-14

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By Jon Poorman

SHENANDOAH — Atascocita has made a living with its big scoring plays this season, but on Friday night, it was The Woodlands that provided the offensive fireworks.

The Highlanders (5-1, 2-0) leaned on their stingy defense and scored three touchdowns of at least 20 yards to hold off the previously unbeaten Eagles (5-1, 1-1) with a 24-14 victory at Woodforest Bank Stadium.

The Woodlands now stands at the top of District 16-6A along with Oak Ridge (5-1, 2-0), which defeated Conroe 56-15 on Friday.

"I think Atascocita may be one of the better teams in our district," Highlanders coach Mark Schmid said. "I kind of felt that coming into this game, and I feel that now after playing them. To come out with a win over them makes you feel really good."

"We've got a lot of football to play, so nothing was decided tonight or last night, but it feels good to get a win over what I feel is a really good football team."

Atascocita, which entered the game with the district's No. 1 offense and defense, hurt itself in key spots with penalties and finished with six flags for 50 yards in total. For the first time this season, the Eagles will have to find a way to bounce back from a loss. The road doesn't get easier, however, with Oak Ridge looming on the horizon.

"We're 1-1, and we've got four games left," Atascocita coach Craig Stump said. "You've got to keep moving, got to keep going. You can't make the same mistakes twice. That's what we talk about all the time. We had a great chance to win the game. We just didn't get it done."

Explosive plays were the name of the game for The Woodlands on Friday night, and none was bigger than Chris Bell's 41-yard touchdown catch with four and a half minutes remaining.

Quarterback Chris Andritsos, who played the entire second half behind center, fired a short pass to Bell on the right side of the field. Bell caught the ball, spun away from the defending cornerback and ran to daylight.

The score put the Highlanders up by double digits and gave them some breathing room after Atascocita had cut their lead to three points early in the third quarter. "It was just an easy hitch," Bell said. "He had been playing off me all night, and that's what I told the coaches. It hit me right in the hands, I took a quick spin, saw some open grass, and I just took it."

The Woodlands' defense was also key in the second half, limiting Atascocita to 98 yards after the break. The Eagles were only able to complete one pass against the Highlanders in the final 24 minutes.

"It was a team effort, definitely," said linebacker Geoffrey Keating, who made several outstanding plays throughout the night. "There were a lot of bad situations where we had to go on the field and we just had to play – line up correctly, and get after it and make plays on the ball."

TC Schneider ended the Eagles' first drive of the game with an interception at the Highlanders' goal line. But three plays later, The Woodlands gave it right back when Ramsey Thunder picked off a pass from Matt Bonaguidi.

Atascocita then went on a seven-play, 43-yard drive, capped by a nifty 25-yard scoring scramble from quarterback Niyi Campbell. Campbell finished the game with 132 yards on 24 carries, accounting for more than 63 percent of the Eagles' ground game.

The Highlanders tied the contest early in the second quarter when Bonaguidi hit Kalif Johnson deep down the right side of the field for a 50-yard touchdown.

The Woodlands' defense then forced a three and out, and Antoine Winfield returned the ensuing punt 27 yards down to the Eagles' 26. Three plays later, Bonaguidi found Bell on a 20-yard touchdown pass for the 14-7 advantage.

"We had three touchdown passes, and those were big plays for us," Schmid said. "We got Chris Bell in the action tonight – he had two – Kalif Johnson had a big touchdown reception, and all of those were at key times when the defense had given us an opportunity to have a shorter field."

Atascocita failed to move the chains on its next possession, and on fourth down, the Eagles opted for a fake punt. The play was snuffed out quickly, though, as Keating made the tackle behind the line of scrimmage and handed the ball over to the The Woodlands' offense at Atascocita's 24.

"I lined up, and a lot of opportunities came my way," Keating said. "I was able to capitalize on those, and I feel very blessed to have had those opportunities and to have made those stops. It was a fun game."

After the turnover on downs, the Highlanders added a 35-yard field goal by Nacho Garcia to give themselves a 17-7 lead with about four and a half minutes remaining in the first half.

The Eagles outgained the Highlanders 181-163 in the first half, but walked into the locker room facing a double-digit deficit.

Atascocita scored on its first drive of the second half, traveling 77 yards in eight plays. Deneric Gibson capped it off, plunging in from four yards out to cut The Woodlands' lead to 3. The score remained that way until Bell's big catch and run, the finishes touches on a big district victory. "I just saw open sideline," Bell said.